



Morning Alert - Thursday, December 28, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning News

Top items on TV networks included reports on heavy snow in Northern Japan, the plan by Tottori prosecutors to bring a summary indictment against sumo grand champion Harumafuji for assault, and the acquittal of a former Aum Shinrikyo cult member over her role in a 1995 parcel bombing at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government building.

All papers other than Nikkei gave top play to reports on the results released by a South Korean government panel of its review of the process leading to the 2015 comfort women agreement with Japan. Nikkei led with a report on an increase in the number of Japanese companies that allow employees to take second jobs.

INTERNATIONAL

South Korean government panel issues results of review of comfort women agreement

All papers ran extensive front-page reports on the release on Wednesday by a South Korean government panel of the results of its review of the process of concluding the 2015 comfort women agreement with Japan. The taskforce report said it is unavoidable that the dispute over the issue will reemerge, despite the agreement reached between the Japanese and ROK governments to finally and irreversibly resolve the issue, because the opinions of former comfort women were not sufficiently reflected in the negotiation process.

Foreign Minister Kono issued a statement saying that the Japanese government does not believe there was a problem in the process leading to the accord because the agreement was reached between the leaders of the two nations through a legitimate negotiation process. The statement

added that bilateral relations will become unmanageable if the South Korean government seeks to change the accord as Japan will never accept such a change. The statement also said that Tokyo strongly demands that Seoul steadily implement the agreement.

The papers wrote that attention will now focus on the next steps taken by the Moon administration. Asahi wrote that the taskforce report will likely have a negative impact on bilateral relations, while Yomiuri and Nikkei wrote that relations between the two nations are likely to deteriorate if the Moon administration calls on the Japanese government to renegotiate the accord. Nikkei wrote that it is unusual for a country to unilaterally review the negotiation process for an international agreement and to publish its findings. The paper added that the document focused on the process leading to the accord, but did not make recommendations as to what the government should do about it. The paper speculated that the Moon administration, which is hoping to invite Prime Minister Abe to the PyeongChang Winter Olympics in February, will probably wait until after the Olympics to announce its stance on the comfort women report.

Foreign Minister Kono proposes four-way talks on Middle East peace

Asahi wrote that it has learned from several sources connected to the Japanese and Israel governments that, during his recent meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Palestinian President Abbas, Foreign Minister Kono proposed the idea of Prime Minister Abe hosting four-party talks on Middle East peace with the leaders of Israel and the Palestinian authority and with senior USG officials. The paper wrote that it remains to be seen whether such a meeting will be realized. Regional Cooperation Minister Hanegbi told the paper that Netanyahu is prepared to accept the invitation and that the participation of the United States would be indispensable.

Meanwhile, Yomiuri wrote that the GOJ is making arrangements to host a meeting in Tokyo next year involving leaders or senior officials from the United States, Israel, the Palestinian authority, and Jordan. The paper wrote that Kono sounded out Netanyahu and Abbas on the idea during their recent meetings, and that Tokyo is envisaging the participation of King Abdullah of Jordan and Special Adviser Kushner.

Foreign Minister Kono holds talks on “free and open Indo-Pacific” in Oman

Yomiuri and Sankei wrote that Foreign Minister Kono held talks with Deputy Prime Minister Fahad and Foreign Minister Alawi of Oman in Muscat on Wednesday. Kono called for Oman’s cooperation in Japan’s efforts to pursue a “free and open Indo-Pacific” in view of the nation’s strategic importance with regard to the Strait of Hormuz as a sea lane. The Omani officials sought Japan’s assistance for port and harbor development.

SECURITY

Japan mulls domestic development of long-range cruise missile

Sankei front-paged a report saying that it has learned from several sources that the GOJ is considering the idea of domestically developing a long-range cruise missile to gain the capability to potentially attack enemy bases. The paper wrote that the GOJ will aim to develop a prototype by fiscal 2022. The paper also wrote that although the GOJ has decided to procure long-range cruise missiles from the United States and other nations, it has also judged that domestic development will be necessary to enhance Japan's defense capability to respond to rising tensions caused by North Korea and China's maritime advancement. The paper speculated that the idea is also aimed at supporting the domestic defense industry.

